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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL 6326, AN ACT CONCERNING THE
RESPONSE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION
AND CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

Good morning, Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify **in support of Raised Bill 6326, An Act Concerning the Response of School Districts and The Departments of Education and Children and Families to reports of Child Abuse and Neglect**. If passed, the bill would implement the recommendations of the joint report of the Child Advocate and Attorney General: *Protecting Our Children: Improving Protections For Children When Allegations Are Made That School System Personnel Abused and/or Neglected Children*.

My name is Christina Ghio and I am an attorney in private practice in Cheshire, CT. I represent children and parents in education related matters as well as child abuse matters. Prior to establishing my own practice, I was an Assistant Child Advocate for the Office of the Child Advocate for four years. During that time, I was the lead investigator on the investigation resulting in the recommendations that HB 6326 would implement. Prior to my time at the OCA, I was the Director of the Child Abuse Project for the Center for Children's Advocacy, representing children in child abuse and neglect cases. I appear before you today as a private citizen, parent, attorney with extensive experience in child abuse and neglect proceedings and education related matters, and an individual who dedicated four years of her career conducting this investigation and developing recommendations. I am very pleased that the Committee has drafted this comprehensive bill and urge you not only to JF the bill but also to ensure that it is passed in its entirety.

The extensive investigation the Child Advocate and Attorney General, which spanned over four years and the entire state of Connecticut, found major flaws in the systems designed to protect children from abuse and neglect by school employees.

Most significantly, the investigation revealed:

- The State Department of Education does not check of the DCF Child Abuse and Neglect Registry to determine if a person has been found to have abused or neglected a child when licensing teachers, school administrators, and others.
- Only a tiny handful of school districts check the DCF Child Abuse and Neglect Registry to determine if a person applying for employment has been found to have abused or neglected a child.
- School employees mandated reporters, and legally required to do so, do not always report suspicion that another school employee has abused and neglected a child to DCF.
- DCF does not have a system in place to document and address failures by mandated reporters to make timely reports.

- When abuse or neglect by school employees is reported to DCF, investigations are not always adequate.
- When school employees are found by DCF to have abused or neglected children, the findings are not always reported to the State Department of Education and the individuals may remain employed in the same district, move within district, or go to other school districts.

HB 6326 incorporates the recommendations of the report to close these gaps. Among other things, HB 6326 would require the State Department of Education to conduct DCF background checks prior to issuing or renewing certificates, authorizations, or permits and local school districts to conduct such checks prior to hiring. Further implementing the recommendations of the report, HB 6326 will strengthen mandated reporter policies and training, require school districts to provide information to DCF when the agency is investigating allegations involving school employees, require school districts to maintain records of allegations of abuse or neglect, and ensure that the Commissioner of DCF notifies the SDE when a teacher or school administrator abuses or neglects a student or has been placed on the DCF child abuse and neglect registry.

While most teachers and administrators are dedicated professionals who do not abuse and neglect children, some school employees do. This bill will ensure that those few who do are no longer permitted to continue teaching.

In closing, I thank you for raising this important bill and urge all members of the committee to support it. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,
Christina D. Ghio, Esq.